

Neighborhoods plan has residents wary

By Orith Goldberg
Staff Writer

STUDIO CITY — Residents said they were concerned about still-unresolved questions regarding the goals and composition of neighborhood councils at a meeting in the San Fernando Valley on Wednesday night.

The 15th of 16 Neighborhood Empowerment Workshops sponsored by the Los Angeles Board of Neighborhood Commissioners was held at CBS Studios so officials could gather ideas from local residents about how the councils will be structured.

Karen Kelly Tobin, the spokeswoman for the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, said the workshops have given residents an opportunity to be part of the process of creating the neighborhood councils expected to be set up next year.

"The residents want to be reassured their voice is going to be heard by local government," Tobin said.

Commission President Lee Kanon Alpert said such councils have been created in other major cities such as Portland, Ore., Seattle and Minneapolis and while they are all different, they appear to be quite effective.

"It all depends on what the neighborhood wants," he said.

Gathering ideas from the 134 residents of Sherman Oaks, Studio City, Toluca Lake and North Hollywood who attended the two-hour workshop, the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment hopes to create a draft of a plan that will ultimately be presented to the City Council in December.

However, some critics said there are key unresolved questions about the goals, sizes, boundaries and funding of such councils.

Some residents said there is too much ambiguity at this point to make solid decisions.

"I continue to think there is enormous confusion about what the Neighborhood Councils are supposed to be, can be or will be," said Polly Ward, 72, the vice president for the Studio City Residents Association.

"I think until the City Council determines what the neighborhood councils will be allowed to be, I don't think there is much we in the community can effectively do."

Emily Williams, a facilitator at the workshop, said there has been much dissension about the size of the neighborhood councils and their boundaries.